



Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers

Testimony opposing HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, Senator Somers, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jesse White-Fresé and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers. I am here to testify in opposition to HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019. Specifically, I am addressing the \$1.1 million dollar reduction to the School Based Health Center line item within the Department of Public Health.

We *all* want children to be healthy and thriving. We want them to feel safe and secure, to have academic success, and to become healthy, productive adults. The reality is that thousands of young people struggle with issues that impact their ability to achieve good health and success in school and in life. Many of them spend too much time in emergency rooms for asthma attacks, or miss a great deal of school due to depression or anxiety, or suffer through their days with tooth pain and dental infections. School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are right there in school to treat all of these issues and many, many more. Building a strong relationship in a safe environment with a trusted adult can change a life, and SBHCs improve children's lives every day. The model works for young people - it is critical to some - and Connecticut has the data to demonstrate its success.

- Within the last 18 months, SBHC funding has been reduced by \$1.7 million dollars
- The Governor's budget proposes to further reduce the funding by an additional \$1.1 million dollars, for a total of a \$2.8 million dollar cut (25%) since January 2015
- Three (3) School Based Health Centers have already closed this year - unprecedented in Connecticut's history -- and many others have reduced their hours, cut back staff, and closed before the end of the school year
- More cuts equal less service -- less service equals problems left untreated and more trips to expensive emergency room care

The students that come to the SBHCs are real people. They want you to hear their stories and see their faces. Their SBHC is a *lifeline* for them and thousands of others. Consider this statement from a high school student in Stamford: "I've been in 2 rehabs, one for attempted suicide, another for drugs. I thought I had no one and that I wasn't worth saving. The SBHC staff were always there for me. They supported me through everything and are the reason I am alive today". Or Efrain's mom from Hartford: "If it were not for this SBHC, I would have to pick him up at school and go to the emergency room each time (for his asthma attacks), and without transportation. My son can attend more school because there is care there". This is what we offer - a literal lifeline and a proven model that works.

On behalf of the 93 Centers that receive state funding, I strongly urge you to *maintain* the current funding level for School Based Health Centers. Children's lives may very well depend on it.

Respectfully submitted,
Jesse White-Fresé
February 23, 2017

Healthy Kids Make Better Learners